

## Andrew Jackson to Henry Dearborn, March 17, 1807, from Correspondence of Andrew Jackson. Edited by John Spencer Bassett.

TO HENRY DEARBORN.

March 17, 1807

Sir , Since the mighty sound of internal war, and conspiracy has completely subsided, since I have made use of every measure in my power as a “ *Genl of the militia to counter act and render abortive* ” any plans hostile to the interest of the Union or to the peace and harmony of our country, and since then I have done these things from principle, from duty and from motives quite different from such as you were pleased to insinuate, (in your letter of the 19th. of December last<sup>1</sup> ) me capable of, I cannot longer smother the indignation excited, on the Occasion. It is a subject that shall have further explanation, and in the mean time, it is my determination that this correspondence be handed out to the world.

<sup>1</sup> It is regrettable that this letter from Dearborn has not been preserved. No trace of it exists in the Jackson MSS., and no copy is found in the files of the War Department.

I will, in the first instance, take the liberty Sir of asking you, whether you did or did not, from this *Story in circulation* , believe me concerned, with any citizens of the U, States, in a *criminal attempt contrary to law, to carry on, a military expedition against the Government of Spain?* And if you did, was it your belief at the time you honored me with your address of the 19th. Dmr., that you could, by inviting me to the commission of a treacherous act utter such views and effect the purposes intended?

You say Sir that it is undustirously reported amongst the adventurers that they are to be joined at the mouth of cumberland by two regiments under the command of Gnl. Jackson.

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Such a *Story* might afford him an opportunity of giving an effectual check to the enterprise, if not too late. After I have given, the most deliber[ate] consideration to your expressions, then, in a degree, ambiguously made, I cannot draw from them any other conclusion than this: that you believed me concerned in the con[s]piracy, that I was an fit subject to act the traitor of traitors, as others have done, and that it was only necessary for the Secretary at war of the United States, to buy me up without honour, money or price. Under these ideas and impressions of this subject, I shall view it and treat it, *for the present* , in my own stile and in such way as I am confident the world will approbate. If Sir *stories* are to be attended to, recd. and acknowledged as evidence of a mans' innocence or guilt, you stand, convicted at the bar of justice, of the most notorious and criminal acts, of dishonor, dishonesty, want of candour and justice. Aside with *stories* and I am well satisfied in my own mind, that you are (altho yr. guilt is not so publicly known) more unprincipled and worthy of punishment, than the nine tenths of those who have suffered under Robespierre, Marat and Wilkinsons despotism. The late Colo. Thos. Butler of the U. States army, who had spent more years in the service of his country, than did the ever memorable Washington, under the combined influence and villanous treatment of yr. self and yr. much loved Genl. Win[ston]kinson, died the death of persicution. But it was necessary, it was indispensably so, that Colo. Butler should by fair or foul means, be driven out of the army. He was a man of worth, of honest princeple and incorruptable hart, and consiquently always in the way and in collision with his Superior officer, and so was Genl. Wayne equally obstructive. By committing murder on the object who would dare to be thus presumptive, there remained little or no difficulty to encounter. *Spanish associations* , conspiracies and treasonable purposes might then have their freeest exercise. Under the sanction and auspices of the government the Secretary at War and Genl. Wilkinson might from *stories or suspicion* arrest any citizen in it, make all civil authority subserviant to the military, suppress the liberty of the press, transport at pleasure, to Washington or Botney bay, every suspicious charecter in it and let such part of the constitution of the United States, as secures the benefit of the writ of *Habe. Corpus* pass for a mere blank. It is a well known fact that you have been uniformly the intimate friend and Supporter of Genl.

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Wilkinson, that you were partial and hypocritically mean to him in the Case of Colo. Butler, and in consequence of the part which I took in favor of the Colo. your spleen your hatred to me became settled and fixed. In the present instance, the first opportunity of gratifying yourself, was afforded and under the garb of official security and importance, you have sought yr. revenge. It has been not only *storiéd* in this part of the western country, but has been reported on the most respectable authority, that Colo. Burr and his adventures held your order as Secretary at War, purporting a furtherence and governmental support of the enterprise. A worthy and respectable member of congress wrote me on the 15th. of Dmr. last that complete and formal proof was then lodged against Colo. Burr in your office.<sup>2</sup> Why then Sir were you so modest on the 19th. day of the same month as to talk about *stories* as it respected myself, and others, whom you stiled *disappointed unprincipled, ambitious or misguided individuals*, and whose names you had not the manly firmness to give up? This kind of duplicity and temerity calculated alone to throw the responsibility that a government of Laws ought to take upon its own shoulders, upon those of an individual, is an additional proof of your original knowledge and privity of those unlawful designs. Those orders to me founded upon *stories* and purporting your

2 No such letter is in the Jackson MSS.

wish, that I should descend from the command of my division and act the part of an deceptive assassin, as did all the rest of yr. orders (if they may be called) reach here immediately after Colo. Burrs departure. In this the design of fatality [?] was evidently marked. But let it be granted that such orders (pretty ones indeed for a military man to write) had been recd. before Colo. Burr descended the river, let me ask the world, if there was anything in them, that would have authorised his arrest? I presume they will readily say there was not. This then goes still further to prove your good wishes in the enterprise.

In as much as I have enemies as well as friends to encounter in this charge of conspiracy, I shall in justice to myself and my friends, whilst on this subject close it with a few general remarks.

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It is Sir only *base* minds that are capable of recommending the commission of a base act. The government must indeed be tottering with its own imbecility when the principal supporters of it, shall be thus insulted, thus assailed by an officer of government, devoid of talents, integrity and altogether ignorant of the duties attached to his elevated station. The nominal dignity that the Secretary at war acquires at the first entrance upon the duties of his office, will always give to his assertions a degree of credit. I know what he has done is unworthy the character of a genl. or a man of honor. I care not, where, when nor how, he shall be met on this emergency. I am equally regardless of this [his (?)] own defence to the world. I know it cannot be predecated on principles either tenable or true. I have no idea, that power shall or ought to secure any man, from the resentment, the punishment proper and such as the injury merits.

Colo Burr when in Tennessee was from time to time at my house, say about 12 days, in the course of said period nor at no other, did he ever utter to me one, single syllable of treasonable matter. He on the contrary stated in strong terms his love of country, and after his arrest in the State of Kentucky discounted<sup>3</sup> largely on his uniform obedien[c]e to the Laws of his country and of his intention to continue such obedience. He was an old acquaintan[c]e and a gentleman that I highly respected and was by me treated as such. He purchased two boats from me and could have had ten more on the same terms and under the same impressions which I then entertained of him.<sup>4</sup>

3 Meaning descanted.

4 Jackson also indorsed for Burr as is shown by the notice of protest from John Wilkes, of New York, dated Jan. 29, 1807:

“Sir, I am desired to inform you, That a bill drawn by A. Burr on Jas. M. Ogden and accepted by him for Five hundred Dollars—endorsed by You was protested Yesterday, Evening, for non-payment, and that the Holder looks to you for payment of it.”

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It betrays great ignorance in the character of any man, who may suppose that two men can be found in the western country willing to form a separation of the western from the atlantick States. The influence of no man or set of men in the united States at this time or any other previously, could ever have effected anything like this. I have Sir transmitted a copy of this letter to the president of the U. States, and the primary object in so doing, is to ascertain through him whether yr. orders of the 19th. of Dmr. last was givn, with his knowledge or with his approbation.

I am yr etc.